

Transylvania County Natural Area Inventory

PISGAH RIDGE/PILOT MOUNTAIN Significant Natural Heritage Area

Site Significance: State

Quadrangles: Sam Knob and Shining Rock

Size: 2,879 acres (2,566 in primary area, 323 in secondary area)

Ownership: National Park Service (Blue Ridge Parkway) and U.S. Forest Service (Pisgah National Forest)

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: This site harbors several northern disjunct and endemic species of plants and animals in rocky outcrops, seeps, streams, and on forested slopes. These include a population of globally rare Smokey Mountain manna-grass (*Glyceria nubigena*) and other unique plant species such as granite dome bluet (*Houstonia longifolia* var. *glabra*), mountain bittercress (*Cardamine clematitis*), pink-shell azalea (*Rhododendron vaseyi*), northern fly-honeysuckle (*Lonicera canadensis*), a wood sedge (*Carex leptonevia*), Biltmore sedge (*C. biltmoreana*), wretched sedge (*C. misera*), and one of few known populations of fringed brome-grass (*Bromus ciliatus*) in North Carolina. Three rare lichen species occur in rocky streams here: rock gnome lichen (*Gymnoderma lineare*), water-fan lichen (*Hydrothria venosa*), and rock-shag lichen (*Ephebe solida*). Several rare animal species of higher elevations are present along the Blue Ridge Parkway and upper slopes of the site, including the Carolina northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus coloratus*), Appalachian yellow-bellied sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus varius appalachiensis*), and the northern saw-whet owl (*Aegolius acadicus*-Southern Appalachian population), which was historically reported from this site. A number of bird species at the southern edge of their breeding range, such as golden-crowned kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*), red-breasted nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*), and winter wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), are common summer residents here. Pisgah Ridge encompasses a number of high quality natural communities including examples of old-growth Red Spruce-Fraser Fir, Northern Hardwood Forest, and High Elevation Red Oak Forest. Rocky areas contain Montane Acidic Cliffs, Boulderfield Forest, and High Elevation Seeps, all of which harbor rare plant populations. In addition, the site provides a large block of unfragmented forest for wide-ranging wildlife and migratory songbirds.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: Pisgah Ridge/Pilot Mountain forms part of the Great Balsam Mountains/Pisgah Ridge Macrosite and is connected to several stand-alone sites as well. The site begins along the Blue Ridge Parkway and reaches southward to Courthouse Falls and the southern slopes of Pilot Mountain. It extends east to west from Seniard Mountain to Tanasee Bald and contains portions of the upper Davidson River watershed and the headwaters of the North Fork French Broad. Devils Courthouse, Graveyard Fields, and Chestnut Bald/Silvermine Bald all adjoin the site to the north. Case Camp Ridge lies to the east, and Tanasee Bald is adjacent to the site on the west. The site is bounded by the Blue Ridge Parkway to the north and NC 215 to the west. Areas of recently logged forest (approximately 15-20 years ago) and Forest Service road networks border the site to the south and are partially included within the site's secondary area in order to connect mature forest communities and maintain the overall integrity of the site.